



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 167

**Repentance and faith** – Though repentance and faith are distinct elements and can be differentiated, they cannot be separated, for they are inextricably linked together. A sinner does not first turn from his sins and at a later time trust in Christ, rather both of these occur simultaneously and at the same time.

We can say that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin, or different elements of the one event or process of conversion, a turning away from sin and toward God. A person who trusts in Jesus must also at the same time forsake his sins, otherwise he has neither repented nor believed. Reformed theologian John Murray calls genuine repentance a “believing repentance,” and genuine faith a “penitent faith.” Our presentation of the gospel message is neither complete nor accurate without the call to sinners to both repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation (WCF 15:1).

**Lordship salvation controversy** – There have been differences of opinion on this point within Protestantism, with some arguing that to require repentance from sin as well as faith in Christ for salvation is to advocate a salvation by works, which is contrary to the gospel of grace. Some hold the view that a person becomes saved when he believes in Jesus as Savior, and at a later time may also submit to Him as Lord. This was the view of Lewis Sperry Chafer, early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arminian and Dispensational pastor and theologian, the founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary. In his Systematic Theology he writes, “The New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation.” He also writes that the preacher is to preach “the Lordship of Christ to Christians exclusively, and the Saviorhood of Christ to those who are unsaved.”

Though others in the past had to some extent argued for or against this point, the issue came to a head in the 1980s, becoming known as the “Lordship Salvation” controversy, with Dallas seminary professor Zane Hodges upholding Chafer’s view, and pastor John MacArthur, also a Dispensationalist, criticizing this view, arguing that one cannot genuinely believe in Jesus Christ as Savior without also submitting to Him as Lord. In reality, the view espoused by MacArthur and others like him is not a new teaching, but has been the historic doctrine of Christianity, as taught in the Bible (Isaiah 55:6-7; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 20:21; 26:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 6:1). The true gospel of salvation includes a preaching of both repentance and faith, which occur together, being both necessary for the salvation of sinners.

Some argue that there are many passages where only faith in Christ is mentioned as a requirement for salvation (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:13). But as stated in the studies on hermeneutics, we do not take verses in isolation and build doctrines upon them; rather, we look at verses in context and in harmony with the clear teachings of Scripture as a whole. We could also cite numerous verses where only repentance is mentioned as a requirement for salvation (Luke 5:32; 24:46-47; Acts 2:37-38; 17:30). All of these show that when the Bible talks about faith in Christ, it also inevitably includes repentance from sin; and also when it talks about repentance from sin, it also undeniably includes faith in Christ.

When we preach the need for faith without also a call for repentance, we are minimizing the gospel, communicating a shallow message, and in reality are presenting a false gospel. This is sometimes referred to as “cheap grace” or “easy believism.” While we affirm the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, this does not mean that the faith that saves is a cheap faith, a superficial faith; rather, the faith that saves is one that is inseparably accompanied by repentance, which will prove its genuineness in a life of growth and good works (Ephesians 2:8-9; WCF 15:3). No one can have Christ as Savior without also having Him as Lord (Romans 6:17-18; 1 John 2:3-6). The Bible calls those who have been saved as those who have died to sin, whose old self has been crucified and buried with Christ, and who have been raised with Christ, and are to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-7, 11; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:9-10; James 2:17).